

# The Million Dollar Mystery

By HAROLD MAC GRATH

Illustrated from Scenes in the Photo Drama of the Same Name by the Thanhouer Film Company

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## CHAPTER II.

### The Master's Man.

Vroon faced Hargreave's butler somberly. The one reason why Braine made this man his lieutenant was because Vroon always followed the letter of his instructions to the final period; he never sidestepped or added any frills or innovations of his own, and because of this very automatism he rarely blundered into a trap. If he failed it was for the simple fact that the master mind had overlooked some essential detail. The organization of the Black Hundred was almost totally unknown to either the public or the police. It is only when you fail that you are found out.

"The patrolman has been trussed up like you," began Vroon. "If they find him they will probably find you. But before that you will grow thirsty and hungry. Where did your master put that money?"

"He carried it with him."

"Why didn't you call for help?"

"The houses on either side are too far away. I might yell till doomsday without being heard. They will have heard the pistol shots; but Mr. Hargreave was always practicing in the backyard."

"The people in those two houses



Lifted the Telephone Off the Hook With His Teeth.

have been called out of town. The servants are off for the night."

"Very interesting," replied Jones, staring at the rug.

"Your master is dead."

Jones' chin sank upon his breast. His heart was heavy, heavier than it had ever been before.

"Your master left a will?"

"Indeed, I could not say."

"We can say. He has still three or four millions in stocks and bonds. What he took to the bottom of the sea with him was his available cash."

"I know nothing about his finances. I was his butler and valet."

Vroon nodded. "Come, men; it is time we took ourselves off. Put things in order; close the safe. You poor jacks, I always have to watch you for outbreaks of vandalism. Off with you!"

He was the last to leave. He stared long and searchingly at Jones, who felt the burning gaze but refused to meet it lest the plotter see the fire in his. The door closed. For fully an hour Jones listened but did not stir. They were really gone. He pressed his feet to the floor and began to hitch the chair toward the table. Half way across the intervening space he crumpled in the chair, almost completely exhausted. He let a quarter of an hour pass, then made the final attack upon the remaining distance. He succeeded in reaching the desk, but he could not have stirred an inch farther. The hair on his head was damp with sweat and his hands were clammy.

When he felt strength returning he lifted the telephone off the hook with his teeth.

"Central, central! Call the police to come to this number at once; Hargreave's house, Riverdale. Tell them to break in."

After what seemed an age of waiting to the exhausted prisoner, with crashing and smashing of doors, the police appeared in the room.

"Where's your sag?" demanded the first officer to reach Jones' side.

"There wasn't any."

"Then why didn't you yell for help?"

"The thieves lured our neighbors away from town. The patrolman who walks this beat is bound and gagged and is probably reposing back of the billboard in the next block."

"Murphy, you watch this man while I make a call on the neighbors," said

the officer who seemed to be in authority. When he returned he was frowning seriously. "We'd better telephone to the precinct to search for Dennison. There's nobody at home in either house and there's nobody back of the billboards. Untie the man." When this was done, the officer said: "Now, tell us what happened; and don't forget any of the details."

Jones told a simple and convincing story; it was so simple and convincing that the police believed it without question.

"Well, if that ain't the limit! Did you hear any autos outside?"

"I don't recollect," said Jones, stretching his legs gratefully. "Why?"

"The auto bandits held up a bank messenger today and got away with twenty thousand. Whenever a man draws down a big sum they seem to know about it. And say, Murphy, call up and have the river police look out for a new-fangled airship. Your master may have been rescued," turning to Jones.

"If I were only sure of that, sir!"

When the police took themselves off Jones proceeded to act upon those plans laid down by Hargreave early that night. When this was done he sought his bed and fell asleep, the sleep of the exhausted. When Hargreave picked up Jones to share his fortunes, he had put his trust in no ordinary man.

A dozen reporters trooped out to the Hargreave home, only to find it deserted. And while they were ringing bells and tapping windows, the man they sought was tramping up and down the platform of the railway station.

Through all this time Norton, the reporter, Hargreave's only friend, slept the sleep of the just and unjust. He rarely opened his eyes before noon.

Group after group of passengers Jones eyed eagerly. Often, just as he was in the act of approaching a couple of young women, some man would hurry up, and there would be kisses or handshakes. At length the crowd thinned, and then it was that he discovered a young girl perhaps eighteen, accompanied by a young woman in the early thirties. They had the appearance of eagerly awaiting some one. Jones stepped forward with a good deal of diffidence.

"You are waiting for some one?"

"Yes," said the elder woman, coldly. "A broken bracelet?"

The distrust on both faces vanished instantly. The young girl's face brightened, her eyes sparkled with suppressed excitement.

"You are . . . my father?"

"No, miss," very gravely. "I am the butler."

"Let me see your part of the bracelet," said the young girl's guardian, a teacher who had been assigned to this delicate task by Miss Farlow, who could not bring herself to say good-by to Florence anywhere except at the school gates.

The halves were produced and examined.

"I believe we may trust him, Florence."

"Let us hurry to the taxicab. We must not stand here."

"My mother?"

"She is dead. I believe she died shortly after your birth. I have been with your father but fourteen years. I know but little of his life prior to that."

"Why did he leave me all these years without ever coming to see me?"

"It is not for me, Miss Florence, to inquire into your father's act. But I do know that whatever he did was meant for the best. Your welfare was everything to him."

"It is all very strange," said the girl, bewilderedly. "Why didn't he come to meet me instead of you?"

Jones stared at his hands, miserably.

"Why?" she demanded. "I have thought of him, thought of him. He has hurt me with all this neglect. I expected to see him at the station, to throw my arms around his neck and . . . forgive him!" Tears swam in her eyes as she spoke.

"Everything will be explained to you when we reach the house. But always remember this, Miss Florence: You were everything in this wide world to your father. You will never know the misery and loneliness he suffered that you might not have one hour of unrest. What are your plans?" he asked abruptly of the teacher from Miss Farlow's.

"That depends," she answered, laying her hand protectively over the girl's.

"You could leave Miss Farlow's on the moment?"

"Yes."

"Then you will stay and be Miss Florence's companion?"

"Gladly."

"What is my father's name?"

"Hargreave, Stanley Hargreave."

The girl's eyes widened in terror. Suddenly she burst into a wild frenzy of sobbing, her head against the shoul-

der of her erstwhile teacher. Jones appeared visibly shocked. "What is it?"

"We read the story in the newspaper," said the elder woman, her own eyes filling with tears. "The poor child! To have all her castles-in-air tumble down like this! But what authority have you to engage me?" sensibly.

Jones produced a document, duly signed by Hargreave, and witnessed and sealed by a notary, in which it was set forth that Henry Jones, butler and valet to Stanley Hargreave, had full powers of attorney in the event of his (Hargreave's) disappearance; in the event of his death, till Florence became of legal age.

Said Jones as he put the document back in his pocket: "What is your name?"

"Susan Wane."

"Do you love this child?"

"With all my heart, the poor unhappy babe!"

"Thank you!"

Inside the home he conducted them through the various rooms, at the same time telling them what had taken place during the preceding night. "They have not found his body?" asked Florence. "My poor, poor father!"

"No."

"Then he may be alive!"

"Fie, God that he may!" said the butler, with genuine piety, for he had loved the man who had gone forth into the night so bravely and so strangely. "This is your room. Your father spent many happy hours here preparing it for you."

Tears came into the girl's eyes again, and discreetly Jones left the two alone.

"What shall I do, Susan? Whatever shall I do?"

"Be brave as you always are. I will never leave you till you find your father."

Florence kissed her fervently. "What is your opinion of the butler?"

"I think we may both trust him absolutely."

Then Florence began exploring the house. Susan followed her closely. Florence peered behind the mirrors, the pictures, in the drawers of the desk, in the bookcases.

"What are you hunting for, child?"

"A photograph of father." But she found none. More, there were no photographs of any kind to be found in Stanley Hargreave's home.

When Norton awoke, he naturally went to the door for the morning papers which were always placed in a neat pile before the sill. He yawned, gathered up the bundle, was about to climb back into bed, when a headline caught his dull eyes. Twenty-one minutes later, to be precise, he ran up the steps of the Hargreave home and rang the bell. He was admitted by the taciturn Jones, to whom the reporter had never paid any particular attention. Somehow Jones always managed to stand in shadows.

"I can add nothing to what has already appeared in the newspapers," replied Jones, as Norton opened his batteries of inquiries.

"Mr. Jones, I have known your master several years, as you will recollect. There never was a woman in this house, not even among the servants. There are two in the other room. Who are they? And what are they doing here?"

Jones shook his head.

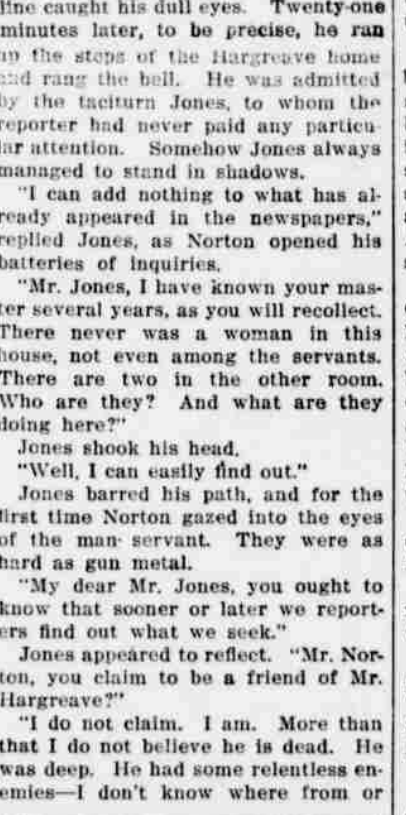
"Well, I can easily find out."

Jones barred his path, and for the first time Norton gazed into the eyes of the man-servant. They were as hard as gun metal.

"My dear Mr. Jones, you ought to know that sooner or later we reporters find out what we seek."

Jones appeared to reflect. "Mr. Norton, you claim to be a friend of Mr. Hargreave?"

"I do not claim. I am. More than that I do not believe he is dead. He was deep. He had some relentless enemies—I don't know where from or



Here, Just Glance Over This.

what kind—and he is pretending he's dead till this blows over and is forgotten."

"You are not going to say that in your newspaper?" Jones was visibly agitated.

"Not if I can prove it."

"If I tell you who those young ladies are, will you give me your word of honor not to write about them till I give my permission?"

Norton, having in mind the big story at the end of this mystery tangle, agreed.

"The elder is a teacher from a pri-

vate school; the other is Stanley Hargreave's daughter."

"Good Lord!" gasped the astonished reporter. "He never mentioned the fact to me, and we've been together in some tight places."

"He never mentioned it to any one but me," Jones again seemed to reflect. At last he raised his glance to the reporter. "Are you willing to wait for a great story, the real story?"

"If there is one," answered Norton with his usual caution.

"On my word of honor, you shall have such a story as you never dreamt of, if you will promise not to divulge it till the appointed time."

"I agree."

"The peace and happiness of that child depends upon how you keep your word."

That was sufficient for Norton. "Your master knew me. He knew also that I am not a man who promises lightly. Now introduce me to the daughter."

With plain reluctance Jones went about the affair. Norton put a dozen perfunctory questions to the girl. What he was in search of was not news but the sound of her voice. In that quarter of an hour he felt his heart disturbed as he had never before been disturbed.

"Now, Mr. Norton," said Jones grimly, "will you be so kind as to follow me?"

Norton was led to Jones' bedroom. The butler-valt closed the door and drew the window shade. Always seeking shadows, this did not impress the reporter at the time; he had no other thought but the story. Jones then sat down beside the reporter and talked in an undertone. When he had done he took Norton by the elbow and gently but forcibly led him down to the front door and ushered him forth. Norton jumped into his taxicab and returned to his rooms, which were at the top of the huge apartment hotel. He immediately called up his managing editor.

"Hello! This is Norton. Put Griffin on the Hargreave yarn. I'm off on another deal."

"But Hargreave was a friend of yours," protested the managing editor.

"I know it. But you know me well enough, Mr. Blair. I should not ask the transfer if it was not vitally important."

"O, very well."

"We shan't be scooped."

"If you can promise that, I don't care who works on the job. Will you be in the office tonight?"

"If nothing prevents me."

"Well, good-by."

Norton filled his pipe, drew his chair to the window, and stared at the great liner going down to sea.

"Lord, Lord!" he murmured. Then he smiled and chuckled. Some bright morning he would have all New York by the ears, the police running round in circles, and the chiefs of the rival sheets tearing their hair. What a story! Four columns on the first page, and two whole pages Sunday. . . . And all of a sudden he ceased to smile and chuckled.

In the living room of the Princess Olga Perigoff's apartment the mistress lay reading on the divan. There was no cigarette between her well shaped lips, for she was not the accepted type of adventuress. In fact, she was not an adventuress; she was really the Princess Perigoff. Her maiden name had been Olga Pushkin; but more of that later.

When Braine came in he found her dreaming with half closed eyes. He flourished an evening newspaper.

"Olga, even the best of us make mistakes. Here, just glance over this."

The Russian accepted the newspaper and read the heading indicated: "Aeronaut picked up far out at sea. Slips ashore from tramp steamer. Had five thousand in cash in his pockets."

"Hargreave escaped!"

"Not necessarily," she replied. "If it was Hargreave he would have had more than five thousand in his pockets. My friend, I believe it is an attempt to fool you; or it is another man entirely." She clicked her teeth with the tops of her polished nails.

"There are two young women in the house. What the deuce can that mean?"

"Two young women? O! then everything's as simple as daylight. Katrina Pushkin, my cousin, had a child."

"Child? Hargreave had a child? What do you mean by keeping this fact from me?" he stormed.

"It was useless till this moment. He probably sent for her yesterday; but in his effort to escape had to turn her over to his butler. We shall soon learn whether Hargreave is dead or alive. We can use the child to bring him back."

The anger went out of his eyes. "You're a wonder, Olga."

"But you should have gone with Vroon last night. He does everything just as you tell him. When they reported that Hargreave had visited Ori's hangar you ought to have prepared against such a coup as flight through the air."

"I admit it. But a daughter! Well, I can bring him back," with a sinister laugh. "By the Lord Harry, I have him in my hands this time, that is, if this girl turns out to be his daughter. A million? Two, three, all he has in the world. I want you to pay a visit right away. Watch the butler, Jones. He'll lie, of course; but note how he treats the girl; and if you get the chance look around the walls for a secret panel. He might not have carried away the cash at all, only enough for his immediate needs, which would account for that five thousand on the man picked up at sea. If I could only get inside that house for an hour!"

"I believe I'll call at once. Leo, was Hargreave the man's real name?"

Braine laughed. "That is of no vital consequence. He will be Hargreave till the end of the chapter, dead or alive. You can tell me the news at dinner tonight."

So, later, when the butler accepted her card at the door, loath as he might be, there was nothing for him to do but admit her.

"Whom do you wish to see, madam?" stepping back into the shadow.

"Miss Hargreave. I'm an old friend of her mother's."

"There is no such person here."

"To whom, then, does this hat belong?" she asked quietly. She waved her hand indolently toward the hall rack.

Jones' lips tightened. "That belongs to Miss Gray, a kind of protegee of Mr. Hargreave's."

"Indeed! You have no objections to my seeing her? My maiden name was Olga Pushkin, cousin to Katrina, wife of Stanley Hargreave. I am, if you will weigh the matter carefully, a kind of aunt."

To Jones it was as if ice had suddenly come into contact with his heart's blood. But as he still stood in the shadow, she did not observe the pallor of his face.

"If you will state exactly why you wish to see her, madam."

"You seem to possess authority?"

"Yes, madam, absolute authority." Jones produced his document and presented it to her.

"There is no flaw in that," she argued readily. "I wish to see the child. I have told you why."

"Very well, madam." Why had they not telegraphed the child, even on the train, to return to Farlow's. He knew nothing of this woman, whether she was an enemy or a friend. He conducted his unwelcome guest into the library.

"How did you know that she was here?" suddenly.

But she was ready. "I did not. But the death of Mr. Hargreave brought me. And that youthful hat in the hall was a story all its own. Later I shall show you some papers of my own. You will have no cause to doubt them. They have not the legal power of yours, but they would find standing in any court."

Jones turned and went in search of Florence.

The princess lost no time in beginning her investigations, but she wasted her time. There was no secret panel in evidence.

"Who is she?" asked Florence as she looked at the card. "Did my father know princesses?"

"Yes," said Jones briefly. "Be very careful what you say to her. Admit nothing. She claims to be a cousin of your mother. Perhaps."

"My mother?" Without waiting for any further advice from Jones, whom Florence in her young years thought presuming upon his authority, she ran downstairs to the library. Her mother, to learn some fact about the mother of whom she knew nothing!

"You knew my mother?" she cried without ceremony.

He heard the princess say: "I did, my child; and heaven is witness that you are the exact picture of her at your age. And I knew your father."

Jones straightened, his hands shut tightly.

"Tell me about my father!"

The princess smiled. It was Katrina Pushkin come to life, the same impulsiveness. "I knew him but slightly. I was a mere child myself when he used to pinch my cheeks. I met him again the other night, but he did not recognize me; and I could not find it in my heart to awaken his memory in a public restaurant."

Presently Jones came in to announce that two detectives requested to see Florence. The two men entered, informing her that they had been instructed to investigate the disappearance of Stanley Hargreave.

"Who are you, miss?"

"I am his daughter."

"Ah!"

One of the detectives questioned Florence minutely while the other wandered about the rooms, feeling the walls, using the magnifying glass, turning back the rugs. Even the girl's pretty room did not escape his scrutiny. By and by he returned to the library and beckoned to his companion. The two conferred for a moment. One chanced to look into the mirror. He saw the bright eyes of the princess gazing intelligently into his.

"I'm afraid we'll have to ask you to accompany us to the station, miss."

"Why?"

"Some technicalities. We must have some proof of your right to be in this house. So far as we have learned, Hargreave was unmarried. It will take but a few minutes."

"And I will accompany you," said the princess. "We'll be back within half an hour. I'll tell them what I know."

Jones, in the hall, caught sight of the reporter coming up the steps. Here was some one he could depend upon.

"Why, Mr. Norton!"

The reporter eyed the princess in amazement.

"You look surprised. Naturally. I am a cousin of Miss Florence's mother. You might say that I am her aunt. It's a small world, isn't it?" But if wishing could poison, the reporter would have died that moment.

"Who are you and what are you doing here?" one of the detectives demanded.

"I am going to ask that very question of you," said Norton urbanely.

"We are from headquarters," replied one, showing his badge.

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"What headquarters? What are they asking you to do?" he said to Florence.

"They say I must go to the police station with them."

"Not the least in the world," laughed the reporter. "You two clear out of here as fast as your rascally legs can



"Tell Me About My Father."

carry you. I don't know what your game is, but I do know every reputable detective in New York, and you don't belong."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the princess; "do you mean to say that these men are not real detectives?"

"This girl goes to the police station, young man. So much the worse for you if you meddle. Take yourself off!"

"All in good time."

"Here, Jenner, you take charge of the girl. I'll handle this guy. He shall go to the station, too."

What followed would always be vividly remembered by Florence, fresh from the peace and happiness of her school life. Norton knocked his opponent down. He rose and for a moment the room seemed full of legs and arms and panting men. A foot tripped up Norton and he went down under the bogus detective. He never suspected that the tripping foot was not accidental. He was too busy.

The other man dragged Florence toward the hall, but there the peaceful butler entered into the field of action with a very unattractive automatic. The detective threw up his hands.

The struggle went on in the library. A trick of jiu-jitsu brought about the downfall of Norton's man, and Norton ran out into the hall to aid Jones. He searched the detective's pockets and secured the revolver. The result of all this was that the two bogus detectives soon found themselves in charge of two policemen, and they were marched off to the station.

"Your advent was most providential, Mr. Norton," said Jones in his usual colorless tones.

"I rather believe so. Why don't you pack up and clear out for a while?"

"I am stronger in this house than elsewhere," answered the butler enigmatically.

"Well, you know best," said the reporter.

The princess was breathing rapidly. No, on second thought she had no wish to throw her arms about the reporter's neck and kiss him.

(To Be Continued)

...The...

'Million Dollar Mystery'

Is Now Being Shown at the

American Theater